

Cottenham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110604
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325179
Inspection date	9 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Lynne Blakelock

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	545
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Arnold
Headteacher	Mrs Jan Wright
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Lamb's Lane Cottenham Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB24 8TA
Telephone number	01954 250227
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: why standards in science have fallen in recent years and how effectively the school is acting to raise achievement in science and also in writing; the reasons for attendance levels being well below average in the last few years and the impact of the school's strategies on raising them; the effectiveness of subject leaders in monitoring pupils' progress and bringing about improvements to the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum. Evidence was collected from: observing lessons and the quality of work produced, discussions with pupils, and with teachers who have specific responsibilities, and from the records of pupils' progress. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a very large school, serving the village of Cottenham and surrounding areas. Children start school with levels of skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age. The proportion of pupils who need additional help with their learning or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Fewer pupils than in most schools are entitled to claim free school meals. The percentages of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are lower than the national average, although rising. There is a growing Irish traveller population. The school has been awarded Investors in People status for the second time. It is a Health Promoting School and has achieved Artsmark Bronze, Eco Schools Bronze, Safe Routes to School and the NAACE information and communications technology (ICT) awards. It has been awarded the Basic Skills Quality Mark for the second time. It is a Cambridge University Training School and a National Support School. An extension to the school building was completed in April 2008 and provides accommodation for group activities, such as parent workshops.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Cottenham Primary is an outstanding school, which provides pupils of all abilities with an excellent all-round quality of education. Pupils make exceptional progress through the school within a very secure and happy environment in which they are equally valued and nurtured. Almost unanimously, parents expressed their total appreciation of the school's work. A typical comment was, 'We are continually impressed by the quality of the teaching, the attitude and leadership of the head and her team and the enjoyment and learning that takes place.'

The starting point for the school's success is the exceptionally strong leadership and management of the headteacher, who leaves nothing to chance and focuses relentlessly and successfully on improving performance in all aspects of school life. She is strongly supported by her senior team. The commitment of all staff and their joy in their work shine through. Very careful planning for improvements, based on rigorous and regular monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance, results in effective systems that continue to move the school forward rapidly. Planning for the new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for example, has been very thorough and has paid off in the great start children are having to their education. The increasingly diverse intake of pupils has been used to add richness to school life and learning, ensuring all pupils are integrated into the school community and are effectively supported and nurtured. In particular, staff work hard to integrate traveller pupils and their parents. The strength of all levels of leadership adds to the school's effectiveness. This includes the clearly defined roles and responsibilities of subject leaders. Such consistency of approach, the school's track record and the continuing and highly relevant professional development of staff result in an outstanding capacity to improve. This is further strengthened by governors' extremely effective involvement in the school's work and their efficient overseeing of its performance.

Teaching, which is mainly outstanding and never less than good, enables pupils to make outstanding progress through the school from their starting points and to meet challenging targets. Careful planning by staff teams and clear learning objectives are significant strengths in the excellent progress of pupils of all abilities. Planning of lessons shows careful attention to matching work closely to the levels at which pupils are working and in providing a very varied range of activities. Computer-based learning is used well to involve pupils in lessons. By the end of Year 2, pupils' standards are consistently above average in reading, writing and mathematics. They showed further improvement in 2008. By the end of Year 6, overall standards have been consistently well above average in recent years. However, there has been a steady decline in science standards in recent years, from average to below average, in 2007.

Management's changes to the organisation and content of science teaching have successfully addressed this deterioration and resulted in exceptionally high results in 2008. Every Year 6 pupil achieved at least the expected national test level in science and 65 per cent reached higher levels. Mathematics results have also improved further to become significantly above the national average. Standards in writing, which have pulled down English results and which have been a school priority for improvement have risen significantly. Evidence in exercise books over the last year shows that the consistent focus by teachers on the purpose of writing is paying off, including for more-able pupils. Pupils' involvement in setting lesson targets, which focus them strongly on their goals, is an important factor in improving standards.

Pupils say how very happy and safe they feel in this extremely caring school. Pastoral and academic guidance are both outstanding for all pupils, reflecting the school's ethos of developing the whole child. All procedures are in place to ensure their safety and well-being. Pupils trust

the staff, who are wonderful role models and are always there to help them. Bullying is rare and not tolerated. Staff monitor pupils' personal and academic development very regularly and keep parents informed of their child's progress and any concerns. Very good support is provided for those, for example, who are learning English, for traveller children, and also for those with attendance issues. Excellent links with external agencies ensure that specialist help is available to support identified pupils' needs. Individual programmes for those who need extra support are presented in a child-friendly way, and help to ensure pupils' focus on their goals. Such programmes are regularly evaluated and amended. A growing strength of the school is the involvement of parents in their children's education, with the new building providing a discrete base for regular parent workshops and consultations.

Pupils' outstanding personal development is demonstrated in their enthusiasm for school and for learning in its broadest sense. They are involved in making important school decisions, such as 'golden rules' for behaviour, and respond very positively to the trust that the staff place in them. This encourages their own considerate and respectful behaviour and makes school an inviting place. Many opportunities to take responsibility, both in and out of school, enable pupils to develop their enterprise skills so that they are really well prepared for secondary school. These opportunities also contribute to their confidence, self-esteem, decision-making and social skills. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and is reinforced through everyday school life, as well as being represented strongly in the excellent curriculum. Pupils from a young age show respect for others, including those from different cultures because lessons give good coverage of the diversity of the world in which we live. Attendance has improved and is now above the national average. This is because the school's expectations of pupils' attendance are high and comprehensive procedures and support are in place for those pupils who have not previously attended as often as they should. Unauthorised absences, however, despite the school's considerable efforts, are above the national average due to a number of parents taking pupils out of school for family holidays.

Pupils are busy and involved in the lively and broad curriculum, which is a strong factor in their outstanding progress. Links across subjects have encouraged creativity, whilst maintaining the school's focus on literacy and numeracy. Learning is relevant, with for example, older pupils calculating the profit on ice cream sales as part of a theme-park project. It is also creative, with music and technology firmly established in the curriculum. ICT is woven into all learning so that pupils' skills are well developed. They enjoy visiting the newly refurbished library, and would like a much broader selection of fiction to select from. The very comprehensive personal, social and health education programme reinforces spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, often involving visitors and also pupils learning by doing. It also promotes pupils' personal development by making sure that they understand the need for healthy eating and exercise and knowing how to keep safe. Pupils are provided with an excellent range of after-school activities, which help them to discover new skills. The school's addition of French and Spanish to the Key Stage 2 timetable, and that of French, Spanish and German as extra-curricular activities for all pupils, have resulted in a whole range of new skills and activities.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children are provided with an outstanding start to their education. Central to this is the very thoughtful and detailed planning of the EYFS, which enables each child's individual social, welfare, emotional and academic needs to be met. It is one example of the highly effective leadership and management of this stage. The close involvement of parents not only ensures

a smooth transition into school, but paves the way for their productive involvement and partnership in their children's learning, right through the school. The new term had just started at the time of the inspection and already children were happy and settling well. Observations show that they are valued and nurtured. They are benefiting from clear routines and staff modelling of good behaviour, kindness and care towards each other. This encourages their sense of security, reinforced by detailed policies and procedures to ensure their welfare. Teaching is outstanding, with planning showing teachers' close understanding of children's needs. Phonics is being taught skilfully at this early stage of the term. There is wonder in children's eyes because they are excited and motivated by the excellent range of resources and by activities, both indoors and outdoors, which cover all types of learning. Classrooms, which are a riot of colour, opportunities and activities, and which are brimming over with interesting images and objects, provide a wonderful environment in which pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve exceptionally well. Records show that children's development is already being assessed and recorded, enabling changes to be made to match their stages of development. They make significant gains in all aspects of their learning from their starting points so that by the time they enter Year 1, most children are confident and independent learners. Children are attaining at least average standards for their age by the end of the EYFS, with many exceeding this level.

What the school should do to improve further

- Involve pupils in stocking the library with a larger and varied selection of fiction, in order to further encourage reading for enjoyment.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cottenham Primary School, Cottenham, Cambridge, CB24 8TA

I enjoyed very much the day I spent with you recently. Thank you for making me so welcome and for showing me round your school. Thank you also to those of you who gave up part of your lunch break to tell me about all the things that you learn and do at school. The term has only just started and it was lovely to see how well you are settling in, especially the children in the Reception classes. This letter will tell you what I have found out about your school.

Your school is an outstanding school. You make excellent progress with your work because of high-quality teaching. Your headteacher leads the school extremely well. All the staff work very hard, look after you and care for you outstandingly well. One of the reasons that the standards you reach are high is because you learn in interesting ways, for example, in themes. You enjoy using ICT in lots of lessons. You appreciate having work that is at the right level because it means that you can make as much progress as possible. Your parents are delighted with all the different opportunities you are given.

I was pleased to see that you all get on with each other so well and behave very maturely. It was also good to see that attendance levels have improved greatly and most of you come to school every day that you should. Please keep this up so that you can make as much progress as possible.

Your headteacher and the staff are always working hard to make your school even better. They agree with you that it would be a good idea to stock the library with a bigger selection of fiction books to encourage you to read even more.

I send you my best wishes for a very happy school year.

Lynne Blakelock

Lead inspector